KOREAN AIRLINER INCIDENT

LEHRER: Shultz also said the shooting down of Korean Airlines Flight 007 a year ago put an indelible stamp on U.S.-Soviet relations. At today's State Department briefing, spokesman John Hughes also had this to say about that. JOHN\HUGHES (State Department Spokesman): There can be no real compensation for the loss of life in this tragedy. Nevertheless, we're deeply troubled by the fact that the Soviet Union has never apologized for its action nor offered restitution to the families of the victims. Finally, we must do what we can to ensure that such an event never happens again. To that end, the United States calls on the Soviet Union to join the international community in observing accepted practices with regard to the safety to civil aviation. The world simply will not accept the repetition of such a senseless tragedy.

LEHRER: There is more to be said and discussed tonight about the KAL anniversary, and Judy Woodruff is in charge of that. Judy?

WOODRUFF: Jim, the Soviets made it clear today they weren't going to sit back and let the Americans reap a free propaganda bonanza from the KAL anniversary. A Soviet TV news commentator reiterated charges the plane was on a spy mission, and the Soviet news agency issued a report which suggested the U.S. may have recovered the black box flight recorder from the downed plane, but is keeping it a secret because its contents helped prove that the plane was spying. Here in Washington, a State Department spokesman called the report absolutely wrong. He said there were international authorities as well as Japanese officials on hand when the search for the black box was conducted and that there was no way the U.S. could have found it without others knowing about it. Also out of Moscow today, the Soviets for the first time acknowledged that the plane was shot down. The phrase was used in a report in the Communist Party newspaper Pravda. In the past, the Soviets have always referred to the plane having been stopped or terminated. Meanwhile, in South Korea, there was a report today that the South Korean government is still seeking compensation from the Soviets for the downed plane and its passengers. All previous demands for compensation from the Soviets have been rejected. Although it's been a year since the incident took place, it is still vivid in everyone's memory, and its impact on East-West relations is still being felt. Because there is so much mystery associated with the fate of KAL 007, we decided to take a brief look back at what happened and at the theories that have emerged since then about why it happened. On Sept. 1, 1983, Korean Airlines Flight 007 took off from Anchorage, Alaska, and headed for

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Seoul, South Korea. Veering westward, the jetliner eventually entered Soviet airspace, first over the Kamchatka Peninsula, the site of a Russian submarine base. Flight 007 continued on across the Sea of Okhotsk and again penetrated the USSR, this time over Sakhalin Island, where the Soviets test fire missiles. Russian fighter planes which had failed to intercept Flight 007 over Kamchatka this time zeroed in on the civilian airliner. A Soviet pilot fired and hit the Korean airliner with a heat-seeking missile. KAL 007 plunged into the Sea of Japan. All 269 people aboard died. The United States has contended from the outset that Flight 007 accidentally wandered off course and that the Soviets downed the plane in reckless disregard for human life. The Soviets, after initial contradictory statements, charged the plane was on a spy mission for the U.S., which they say bears responsibility for the tragedy. Despite an extensive air and sea search by the U.S., the Soviet Union and Japan, the Korean airliner's flight recorder was never recovered. Without the plane's black box, there can be no definitive answer as to why Flight 007 was off course. The International Civil Aviation Organization cited probable human error in programming the jetliner's navigational computer, or possibly a computer malfunction, but other aviation experts are dubious. One year later, the story of the downing of Flight 007 is incomplete. A lack of hard evidence and government secrecy for national security have helped fuel speculation. Reports in American and British journals and a British TV documentary have raised questions about the extent of U.S. knowledge and involvement, questions like, how could the U.S., with its massive electronic listening posts in the region, fail to detect an airliner more than 200 miles off course? And how can an American spy plane, which also happened to be in the vicinity, not have spotted the Korean airliner and made sure it was warned that it was off course? The reports conclude it's very unlikely the entire episode was an accident. Instead, they assume it was one of two things, a deliberate and carefully planned intelligence operation or, originally, an accident. But when U.S. officials became aware of it, and believing the Soviets would not shoot down an unarmed passenger jet, they permitted the plane to continue on its course in order to gather valuable intelligence about how the Soviet Union responds to an invasion of its airspace. Here to debate these and other questions is, first, the man who was a source for those news reports, John Keppel, who spent 22 years with the State Department before he retired in 1969. He was on the Soviet desk of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the time of the U-2 spy plane shoot-down in 1960. Also, Lawrence Eagleburger, who put in 27 years at the State Department before he retired earlier this

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year as the undersecretary for political affairs. As the third-highest official in charge at the department, he coordinated the U.S. response to the incident when it occurred. Mr. Keppel, let me begin with you. How can you be so sure that this entire incident was not an accident? JOHN\KEPPEL (former diplomat): I think the first part of the question is whether you can believe that the, whether you can convince yourself that it could, that the plane could have got to Sakhalin accidentally. And there, I would like to say that the ICAO report, which put forward two of the most plausible theories as to how an innocent navigational error could have brought it there, was repudiated by a second ICAO body, the Air Navigation Commission. Now, I'm not an airman myself, but I've talked to quite a few, particularly Bob *Allerdyce, who was on 20/20 magazine last night, who has really been through this thing with great care.

WOODRUFF: Well, what... KEPPEL: And it seems quite clear that you cannot fly this course without entering in the position reports that are turned in, accidentally.

WOODRUFF: And yet the ICAO report indicated that it was probably human error. KEPPEL: Yes. And I, but as I say the Air Navigation Commission of the ICAO, it said itself, repudiated those two innocent hypotheses. And, oh, we don't have time to do it now, but there are quite concrete reasons why they don't work. And there are a number of other scenarios of innocent errors that don't meet the two sets of facts I mentioned. The day that...

WOODRUFF: The fact... Go ahead. KEPPEL: Sorry. The data in the, the data that in the position reports or what we know of the course that was actually flown.

WOODRUFF: What do you think happened? KEPPEL: I think it was, it had to get there intentionally, and that therefore, you have to face the other questions in the case. Now, I think the evidence is less certain with regard to whatever possible U.S. involvement there was in the case. But I think that the apparent relationship to a number of U.S. intelligence assets was sufficiently close so that you have enough evidence to warrant a proper inquiry.

WOODRUFF: You're saying you think the plane was on a spy mission, or not? KEPPEL: I'm saying I'd like to not to be the judge and the jury. I'm trying to say that I think there's enough evidence to require a proper inquiry.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Eagleburger, how do you respond to that? LAWRENCE\EAGLEBURGER (former undersecretary of State): Well, with total disagreement, I guess is the simplest way to put it. And without getting into a debate about

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reports, I'm prepared to accept an ICAO report written by aviation experts, not Americans, international experts, which clearly said that in their judgment, there had to be some sort of a navigation error that led to the plane's being off the course. I have also read the Air Navigation Commission report that Mr. Keppel talked about. I read it differently. I read it as simply saying that there was not sufficient evidence to make a difference. I don't think it is at all clear that that report repudiated the ICAO report. But all of this, it seems to me, misses the basic point, which is that a year ago, the Soviets murdered 269 people. And for some period of time, the Soviets have been trying, one way or another, to try to establish a case that it was our fault and not theirs, without any success. And here we are now, a year later, debating that same issue all over again.

WOODRUFF: Is there any possibility in your mind that the plane could have been on an intelligence, on a spy mission? EAGLEBURGER: There is absolutely no reason for me to believe that. When I was in the department at the time, I was in fact responsible within the State Department for most of the contacts with other agencies, including with regard to intelligence missions, and I can state absolutely and categorically that I know nothing about any such flight, and I don't believe it ever took place.

WOODRUFF: All right. And what, then what about the other theory that this whole thing started as an accident, but once the Americans realized what was happening, they thought, 'OK, we'll go ahead and let the plane continue on its course and we'll get this great once-in-a, you know, many-years' opportunity to see how the Soviets respond to a penetration of their airspace'? EAGLEBURGER: Well, I think there are two answers to that. The first of which is, with all respect, the U.S. government can't act that quickly. We just don't do things that way. Secondly, it would have had to have been approved at a very high level and again, I was not aware of any such thing. The secretary of State, I know, was not. I totally believe that the president or no one else was. It was not done for those reasons at all. In my view, it's just not acceptable.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Keppel? KEPPEL: I, I...

WOODRUFF: Is that plausible to you? KEPPEL: Not really. I think that you have to start with the facts of the flight, and if you can, if you cannot convince yourself, if you cannot see a way in which any of the innocent hypotheses can make sense, you then have to face the fact that it may have been intentional. And if you face the fact that it may be intentional, you then have to start

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looking at the other evidence. And there is quite a lot of other evidence that is very suggestive that there was coordination with, as I say, other intelligence assets. And let me make a point with regard to the mysteries in this case. There are at least six areas in the case that I can identify where there are quite specific questions, which I think could easily be resolved by evidence in the possession of the United States government for which there is no valid reason to hold secret. With intelligence gathering, usually it's the ability to collect the information rather than the information itself that is very sensitive.

WOODRUFF: But doesn't all that come down to an assumption on your part that, I mean, for any of these theories to have worked, to have been the real situation, the United States would have had to have been putting at risk the lives of 269 innocent people. I mean, doesn't that have to be part of the motive at work for any of those theories that you're saying? KEPPEL: Well, I know enough about past history to know that funny things do happen in the world, sometimes in wartime, sometimes on the eve of war, sometimes in lesser cases. And so I think one has to face the facts and not face the facts coming from assumptions. EAGLEBURGER: Well, if I may, if I may, what all of these arguments, in the last analysis, boil down to, including Mr. Keppel, is that senior U.S. government officials, including either implicitly or explicitly the president of the United States, engaged in a conspiracy which put at risk the lives of 269 innocent people. Now, we may have reached the stage in this country where that is a legitimate claim that can be made, day in and day out, but I don't happen to accept it. Neither the president nor the senior officials of the U.S. government play games with peoples' lives this way, when there are simple explanations of why the plane was where it was, and where civil aviation authorities, not American civil aviation authorities, can come up with legitimate explanations. I don't know why we have to go through these conspiracy fears.

WOODRUFF: Well, then, Mr. Eagleburger, let me ask you this... EAGLEBURGER: Right.

WOODRUFF: Since Air Force radar spotted the plane within, apparently within a few minutes after it left Anchorage, found that it was off course, why wasn't the plane notified? EAGLEBURGER: Well, with all respect, that's a fact that I don't think is the case. My understanding and my recollection from the, a year ago when I was dealing with this case, in fact, is that our radar can cover that plane out to 165 miles from Alaska. It cannot be picked up from the Japanese end of the course until it is about 165 miles north of Japan. The large distance in between those two radars was, in fact, not covered. Our radar did

not ascertain that the aircraft was wildly off course. And there was no way, in fact, to tell it, despite all of these articles now which say we have all of these resources. The fact of the matter is, there were two radars covering that aircraft and we were not covering it in the period between those two distances in the *Shimya radar which is now claimed should have picked it up, in fact, could not pick it up at all.

WOODRUFF: Well, if it was picked up, do you think the plane should have been notified? EAGLEBURGER: If it was picked up, obviously it should have been notified. I doubt that it was picked up beyond which the military radar which are now being referred to. Their task was, in fact, not to follow civilian aircraft. What we have done since the Korean shootdown is, in fact, put a radar into the *Shimya facility on Aleutian, on the Aleutian Islands which, in fact, now follows civilian aircraft, and when they are noted to be off course, in fact, notifies them of such. We did not have such a facility prior to the shooting down.

WOODRUFF: Mr. Keppel, do you think all the facts of this will ever come out? KEPPEL: I don't know. But I would like to dispute a couple of facts that we've just done. May I?

WOODRUFF: Sure. KEPPEL: OK. There was a second radar on the Alaskan side which was the military radar at King Salmon, whose data was revealed later. And the track given there is approximately a continuation of the civilian radar that we started with. This takes you down...

WOODRUFF: Can you make your point, briefly? Can you make your point briefly? KEPPEL: All right. OK. Sure. There is additional U.S. radar data which shows that the plane was off course, substantially off course, at its first weigh point, and there is further U.S. radar data. And there is further U.S. radar data that has not been disclosed...

WOODRUFF: And... KEPPEL: ...that would show a further turn to the north for which there is no innocent explanation and no reason to hold the radar data secret.

WOODRUFF: And the point of that is, you're saying the Americans did know and didn't do anything about it? Is that right, sir?

KEPPEL: We certainly know now after the event that it, that the kind of ICAO report conclusion won't work, based on evidence now in the possession of the U.S. government.

WOODRUFF: All right. This is the sort of thing we'll have to debate again, hopefully, in the near future. Thank you, Mr. Eagleburger and Mr. Keppel, for being with us.